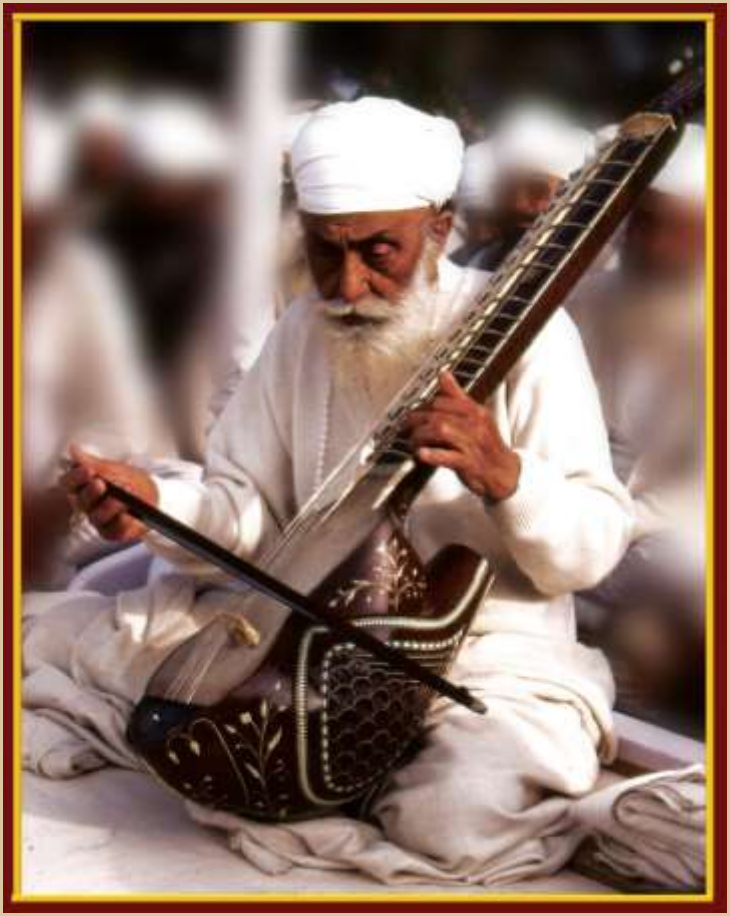
Namdhari touch to classical music



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Namdhari touch to classical music

A summing-up of the six-day Sadguru Pratap Singh Smriti Sangeet Sammelan, sponsored by the Namdhari Sangat, a Delhi-based organization, at Aurangabad.

MOHAN NADKARNI

The Illustrated Weekly of India, June 28, 1981

THE start of any sangeet sammelan season these days invariably raises the question whether the audience will show up. This is especially so in metropolitan cities like Bombay and Delhi, where music festivals, often stereotyped, badly organised, indifferently scheduled and exorbitantly priced, come and go in a row (at times clashing, too) ritualistically from October to May, year after year.

The six-day Sadguru Pratap Singh Smriti Sangeet Sammelan, sponsored by the Namdhari Sangat, a Delhi-based organisation, at Aurangabad sometime back unfolded a spectacle incredibly different from that of the run-of-the-mill metropolitan soirees.

Indeed, this marathon event revived nostalgic memories of the 'fifties, when sammelans, as a new vogue, symbolised all that was truly Satyam Shivam Sundaram in contemporary traditional music. This was most unmistakably reflected, among other things, in the tremendous audience participation that marked them then.

Fantastic then would be the word to describe the audience participation that witnessed the Aurangabad

sammelan. And this, despite the cold winter winds blowing in the city.

The Turn Out

On the opening day, the turnout was estimated at 4,000, with the huge pandal which the sponsors had erected, with typical foresight, on the specious grounds of the Marathwada Samskriti Mandal. The crowd swelled to 8,000 on the final night, with the overflow spilling over on to a large part of the open space outside the pandal.

That the Aurangabadis are truly a tougher lot could also be seen from the way they put up with the obvious physical discomfort involved in baithak-style sitting in a jampacked pandal. And this they did night after night, sitting through the entire proceedings in pin-drop silence. What a contrast to the disconcertingly familiar sight at the Bombay sammelans, where chairs rattle and nylons rustle as the endless trickle of latecomers keeps moving across the auditorium right in the midst of a concert!

The involvement of the mixed audience was thus total and complete. Even to the sammelan sponsors, who

have held six such sammelans in Delhi, Bombay and Lucknow since 1973, it came as a landmark in their own field. To the local population, it made history, in that the event made it possible for the ordinary man and woman from the hinterland to have an opportunity to enjoy the performance of some of our best exponents of traditional music. To them, celebrities like Shivkumar Sharma, Hariprasad Chaurasia, Vilayat Khan and Amjad Ali must have so far been a legend, at best heart through the broadcasting and recorded media.

The sammelan served convincingly to explode the myth that classical music goes above the heads of the common people – that it is far removed from their taste. More importantly, the sammelan also showed that it possible to provide a healthy counter-influence on the mass scale to the unabashedly unhealthy distractions that much of our film music purveys to the masses and corrupts and coarsens their aesthetic sensibilities.

The organizers received active guidance from several cultural institutions, besides the civic authorities. A measure of the impact of the sammelan was also seen in the reception accorded to the spiritual head of the 11-lakh Namdhari Sikhs, Sadguru Jagjit Singhji Maharaj, by the

Aurangabad municipality during the intermission of the final session. To say the least, it signified a welcome break from the unenviable past when musicians and artistes were denied their due place of honour and usefulness in the social scheme.

Disciplined

The Namdhari Sikhs are a highly disciplined community and they seem to impart a sense of dedication and perfection to whatever they do. Their forefathers, several of whom suffered imprisonment and even martyrdom had challenged the imperial might of the British rulers and boycotted everything that was British till India became free in 1947. They now excel as much in farming and animal husbandry as in business and industry.

The same kind of discipline and dedication has characterized their involvement in traditional music which, to quote the Sadguru, "has been an integral part of the Sikh guru parampara and a way of life with the Namdharis."

The 60-year-old Sadguru, himself a great scholar-musician and composer like his distinguished father and

guru, Pratap Singhji Maharaj, is the guiding spirit behind these sammelans. He himself sat through the proceedings night after night and personally pushed through the performing schedules with amazing punctuality.

No wonder, then, that most of the 25 odd artistes billed for the festival were inspired to give of their best. Significantly, there were only three old veterans among them – the septuagenarian Mallikarjun Mansoor, the sitar maestro Vilayat Khan and the vichitra veena wizard, Gopal Krishan, both in their 50's – while greater representation was approrpriately given to the younger executants in their prime like Hariprasad Chourasia (flute), Shivkumar Sharma (santoor), Amjad Ali (Sarod), Singh Bandhu and Mishra Bandhu (vocalists).

But it was the still younger element, all Namdharis, in their early 20's, who, by their brilliant recitals, proved that there is enough talent in the young people to make such sammelans a meeting ground not only of the past and the present but also of the past and the future. Among them were Harbhajan Singh (dhrupad-dhamar) and Baljit Singh (khayal and sarangi), Gurudev Singh (sarod), Kiranpal Singh

(santoor) and Avatar Singh, Sukvinder Singh and Sukvinder Pinky (all percussionists).

Some of the youngsters have been groomed in the old traditions by the Sadguru himself and his younger brother, Bir Singhji Maharaj while others have been placed for training under established masters.

Besides the only dance concert by the Kathak maestro, Birju Maharaj, Nath Neralkar, a noted local vocalist, was featured in the festival. Incidentally, there were no women artistes. The parampara does not permit their participation.

Keeping the Tradition Alive

THE Namdharis' love of classical music is inspired by the first guru of the Sikhs, Nanak Dev. He was a full-fledged musician and the Holy Book, the Adi Granth (Granth Sahib) is possibly the only religious work where almost all the hymns are set to raga music.

At Guru Nanak's signal, Bhai Mardana, his life-long companion and rabab player, would strike the swaras of a chosen raga. The bani would then flow from the guru's lips. There is a rare picture of the guru with Bhai Mardana sitting by his side, playing the rabab. These inspired hymns, known as Gurbani, are enshrined in the Holy Book.

The morning prayers in the numerous gurdwaras, scattered in far-flung hamlets and towns in Punjab and elsewhere, begin with the swaras of the raga Asa. The vesper-time kirtans ar set to ragas like Yaman.

In the post-Guru Nanak period, during the time of Guru Arjun Singh, the chief musicians of the Golden Temple of Amritsar became egoistic and lax. The Guru therefore ordered their dismissal and commanded every member of his congregation to learn traditional music. The Namdharis are the inheritors of this tradition.

Until 1947, the Golden Temple was the only sacred place where rabab-players gave recitals set to pure classical ragas. But now, the tradition is also found preserved and fostered in the Gurdwara of Bhaini Sahib, the spiritual centre

of the Namdhari Sikhs in Ludhiana district, under the guidance and direction of Sadguru Jagjit Singhji Maharaj.

According to Sardar Harbinder Singh Hanspal, personal secretary to the present sadguru, Namdharis are the traditional Sikhs and strictly follow the preachings of living gurus. They are the true followers of the Gurbani with implicit faith in the Sikh guru-parampara and the Holy Granth.

The Namdharis, who are vegetarians and teetotalers, believe that traditional music is a step forward to attain the goal of life. To them, traditional music is a "Ladder unto God."

ਸ੍ਰੀ ਸਤਿਗੁਰੂ ਰਾਮ ਸਿੰਘ ਜੀ ਸਹਾਇ ॥

NAMDHARI SANGAT, Aurangabad
Presents
SATGURU PARTAP SINGH COMMEMORATIVE
SANGEET SAMMELAN
being held on
14th, 15th, 16th, 19th, 20th & 21st Dec., 1980
at OPEN AIR THEATRE,
Marathwada Sanskritik Mandal,
Aurangabad (Maharashtra)
His Holiness SATGURU JAGJIT SINGH JI
will grace the occasion
by his benign presence
you are cordially invited
as per programme given on back

Bir Singh (Maharaj)

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Admit Two

PROGRAMME

Sunday, 14th December, 1980 6-30 p.m.

S. Harbhajan Singh & Party	Vocal
S. Gurdev Singh	Sarod
Shri Kumar Bose	Tabla
(INTERVAL)	
Pt. Birju Maharaj	Dance
Ustad Zakir Hussain	Tabla

Monday, 15th December, 1980 6-30 p.m.

Singh Bandhu	Vocal
Shri Kumar Bose	Tabla
(INTERVAL)	
Namdhari Students	Vocal
Pt. Hari Prasad Chaurasia	Flute
Ustad Zakir Hussain	Tabla

Tuesday, 16th December, 1980 6-30 p.m.

Shri Rajan Sajan Mishra	Vocal
Sultan Khan	Sarangi
Mehmood Dhaul Puri	Harmonium
Kumar Bose	Tabla
(INTERVAL)	
Shri Sukhvinder Singh Pinki	Solo Tabla
Ustad Vilayat Hussain Khan	Sitar

Friday, 19th December, 1980 6-30 p.m.

Namdhari Students	Vocal
Shri Gopal Krishan	Vachitar Veena
(INTERVAL)	
Pt. Malik Arjun Mansoor	Vocal
Mehmood Dhaul Puri	Harmonium
Sultan Khan	Sarangi
Valmik Dhande	Tabla

Saturday, 20th December, 1980 6-30 p.m.

Shri Nath Neralkar	Vocal
Sultan Khan	Sarangi
Mehmood Dhaul Puri	Harmonium
(INTERVAL)	
Namdhari Students	Vocal
Pt. Shiv Kumar Sharma	Santoor
Shafat Ahmed	Tabla

Sunday, 21st December, 1980 6-30 p.m.

Pt. Ram Narain	Sarangi
Shri Prabhudat Bajpai	Tabla
Shri Mohinder Singh	Vocal
S. Avtar Singh	Tabla
Sultan Khan	Sarangi
Mehmood Dhaul Puri	Harmonium
(INTERVAL)	
Ustad Amjad Ali Khan	Sarod

Pt. Kishan Maharaj & Pt. Samta Prasad Tabla

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